

A Life Fully Lived

Although Cole Williamson was born with a major heart defect and later diagnosed with autism and severe allergies, he didn't



Cole Williamson never focused on what he couldn't do ... he always lived "in the moment" and inspired everyone he met.

know he was different. There was nothing in the world preventing him from enjoying a true zest for life. He was always happy, made everyone laugh, loved music and dancing, and even played basketball at school. Cole never focused on what he couldn't do, such as talk; rather he always lived "in the moment," which is why he continues to be an inspiration to everyone he ever met.

"Coley," as his family calls him, was Kathy and Craig Williamson's miracle child. After a routine well-baby exam at the age of six weeks, Cole's doctor detected a heart murmur. Within several hours, his family learned that he would not survive without a heart transplant.

Cole was put on a respirator to begin his fight for life while he awaited a new heart. Within a few days, his situation became life-threatening, and the family knew it would take nothing short of a miracle to find a donor heart for Cole.

That miracle soon was granted, and Cole endured the 12-hour surgery, followed by seven weeks of touch-and-go recovery. His family learned then what would be proven later ... that Cole was a fighter. Through it all, his parents kept an upbeat, positive attitude. They showed their friends and family the meaning of true faith while also maintaining a wonderful sense of humor.

The Williamsons happily brought Cole home and faced each new challenge with strength and love. Soon they added to their family with daughter, Emily, who became her brother's best friend. "Emily was the most normal thing about Cole's life," said Craig. "Like all brothers and sisters, though, they got mad at each other and fought."

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A TRIBUTE TO COLE

Written by family friend Mable L. Winn



You were such a special person,
The first time we met,
Full of love, hugs and kisses
An encounter I won't forget.

Truly an amazing young man,
Who lived his life,
One who has gone home to be with Jesus,
Out of sound, but not out of sight.

I see the kind of person you were Cole,
I hear it when family speaks your name,
Such a joy to the people who knew you best,
Life without you won't be the same.

Journey well to heaven my angel,
You were simply the best,
Son, grandson, brother, friend, nephew,
Where God will give you rest.





Health-Related Quality of Life

From the Medical Director:
Bob Archuleta, MD, FAAP, FAAHPM

In my more than 29 years in pediatric practice, I have learned that children are most likely to enjoy a higher quality of life if they also enjoy good health, which is directly dependent on the following eight key dimensions: physical health, emotional health, behavioral health, social health, family and cultural health, cognitive or academic health, spiritual health, and community connectedness. When all eight dimensions of good health are in proper balance, a child is more likely to enjoy a high quality of life.

Clearly, being healthy is characterized by more than being able to function or pursue one's goals in a physical sense. The healthy child is not consumed by emotional distress, irresolvable sadness, anxieties, worries or fears. They have meaningful friendships, enjoy learning, have an understanding, acceptance and appreciation for their own spiritual beliefs, values and rituals, and have a community of support, whether that community is family, friends, school, church or the broader community.

Caring for infants, children and adolescents living with a complex, life-threatening illness is one of the most challenging aspects of pediatrics because the child and family have so many needs. Their sense of wholeness is disrupted or fractured, and as the illness unfolds, their needs become physical, emotional, social, spiritual, financial, practical

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and cultural. Added together, the physical pain and various distressing symptoms, the emotional pain of fear, anxiety and depression, the social isolation, the lost opportunities and loss of hope, and increased dependency result in something we recognize in palliative medicine as “total pain” or “lack of wholeness.” This state of total pain constitutes “suffering.”

Whenever one of the eight dimensions of quality of life is out of order, it becomes necessary for the other dimensions to assume a greater prominence to restore the proper balance that creates a feeling of wholeness. Only by making a patient feel whole can their suffering be diminished. Attention must be focused on the child and family and all their distressing needs, taking into consideration their fears, hopes, wishes and dreams. The interdisciplinary team of Noah's Children helps to meet the family's needs so that they can use their love and strength to overcome the suffering they are experiencing. Helping a child and family who live with a life-threatening illness does not mean making the disease go away; rather the goal is to help restore wholeness and relieve the suffering. This should be a fundamental goal of medicine, and it is the fundamental goal of Noah's Children.



“Cole was given to our family for a reason. He definitely brought us closer together,” says sister Emily Williamson.

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Still, says Emily, “I feel really blessed, and I wouldn't have wanted it any other way. Cole taught all of us so much. He taught me to be more relaxed about things and to be kind to everyone. I believe he was given to our family for a reason. He definitely brought us closer together.”

The Williamsons became involved with Noah's Children in May 2006. Said Kathy, “It really helped to have someone to talk to and work through the emotions. They truly understood us and what we were going through, and they loved Cole as much as we did, accepting us and him unconditionally.” Craig, who stayed home to care for Cole for 15 years, said Noah's Children helped him “release stress that I hadn't realized was there.”

For 18 wonderful years, Cole led a full life, characterized by an unforgettable energy, smile and laughter. His friends and family made every day a happy one for him and reveled in the many lessons he taught them along the way. Cole left his physical place in the world on January 18, 2009, but his spirit will remain here always, as will the mark he left on everyone who met him.

Photos of Cole Williamson courtesy of Patricia Lyons.

Service of Remembrance

In the packed chapel of St. Francis on February 28, more than 40 people gathered to remember their loved ones in an annual ceremony hosted by Noah's Children. Led by founder Dr. Bob Archuleta, the service combined video, photos, stories, candle-lighting and prayers. Seven families offered reflections in which they shared their struggles and strengths in dealing with the deaths of their children.

"We host this annual service for families as part of the healing process," said Rev. Sallye Hardy, chaplain. "Families who have lost a loved one can attend the service, talk about their child's life and death, and know that they are with people who truly understand."

Reflections from Family

Two parents who shared their story during the service were Susie and Grady Nash, who lost their daughter Tyler in 2001. Susie wrote this tribute the morning of the Remembrance Service.



Tyler Nash

Tyler had a whole host of medical problems. She was in and out of the hospital most of her life. Yet what I remember today is her smile and her big belly laugh.

About a year into my grieving her death, [a friend] said to me that I must figure out a way to let her go and yet take her with me. At the time I did not think this was possible. All I could think about was the fact that I could not hold or touch her. The pain from that fact was too strong.

About a month ago, I was lying in bed with my two-year-old granddaughter Ella. We were watching a little bear video. There was a scene where the squirrels were throwing acorns at little bear. Ella got to laughing so hard, it got me to laughing out loud too. As I lay there with her laughing, I could hear Tyler's laugh as we lay in her bed [during] the last year of her life laughing at her videos. And the thoughts and



A heart of remembrance is displayed at the annual Service of Remembrance ceremony hosted by Noah's Children on February 28, 2009.

feelings of lying there with Tyler came over me, and made me smile and laugh even harder. There was no sadness for how sick she was at the time, just the wonderful memory of her laugh and the gift of hearing it again in my granddaughter.

Today we have taken her with us, and I see it often ... in the way my oldest daughter lives her life, in the laughter of my granddaughter and in the decisions I make daily based on my time with Tyler. This is a gift no one can take from us. And today the Nash family is still a family of four, one of us just hangs out somewhere else, and lives within us and our hearts daily.

Welcome to Our New Chaplain



Rev. Sallye A. Hardy

Noah's Children recently increased its capacity to serve children and families by bringing on board a new chaplain. Rev. Sallye A. Hardy, M.Div., started in January and immediately began the planning process. "My first priority is to really get to know the families Noah's Children is serving and create additional ways to support them over the long term." Other plans include the development of a comprehensive bereavement program for parents, siblings and extended family.

Sallye received her Master's of Divinity degree from Duke University and has been involved in human services her entire career, including jobs as director of a family violence program and owner of a licensed daycare center in North Carolina. Ordained in the United Church of Christ, she primarily chose Noah's Children

"My role is to assist families with the spiritual components ... and walk with them as they create new meaning and purpose for their lives."

because of its focus on kids and families, but also because of its interdisciplinary approach. "It is truly a holistic service for children and families," Sallye added.

"My role as the Noah's Children chaplain," Sallye continued, "is to assist families with the spiritual components of this difficult time and walk with them as they create new meaning and purpose for their lives in the midst of such a hard time. Losing a child is a life-changing experience." To speak with Sallye or any of the Noah's Children staff, please call (804) 213-0360.

Meet Our Hospice Team: Kathy Lesher, MSW



Kathy Lesher, MSW


Kathy Lesher, who joined Noah's Children in 2005 as a Social Worker, brings a unique perspective to her work, as both her brother and father received hospice services before their deaths. A cancer survivor herself, Kathy says this work "fits me like a glove. Partly due to my life experiences, I am comfortable talking with people about death and dying, or sitting quietly with people who are grieving. The families we work with are on an amazingly difficult journey and sometimes they just need someone to listen to their stories and hold some of their pain. Being diagnosed with cancer 15 years ago was a wake-up call for me to pay attention to life and its preciousness. That thread continues today through the work I do at Noah's Children."

Kathy received her BFA in Dance and Choreography. More than 20 years later, she received her Master's in Social Work. Before coming to Noah's Children, Kathy's work included facilitating creative movement with children, creating and selling her own artwork, and teaching preschool. Kathy is a member of the Bereavement Coalition of Central Virginia, serves on the Advisory Board for the Full Circle Grief Center and is preparing for the LCSW exam.

THANK YOU DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS

Noah's Children has accomplished so much over the years because of friends like you. Whether it's making a donation or volunteering your time, your support helps us provide quality care and services to families. On behalf of the staff and families we serve, Thank You!

Save the Date!
October 23, 2009
Forty One Benefit
for Noah's Children



Noah's Children®
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